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Saskatchewan
Agriculture
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Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Week of July 16, 2007

SASKATCHEWAN AGRI-FOOD MEETS THE WORLD IN CHICAGO

A group of Saskatchewan companies and organizations will be showcasing the province's agri-food industry at the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) conference in Chicago at the end of July.

The IFT gathering, called "FoodSmarts," brings together researchers, executives, marketing organizations and buyers from around the world for four days.

The Saskatchewan delegation is being co-ordinated by Ag-West Bio Inc., the member-based organization that works to create new value in agriculture, food, health and bio-based products in the province, with sustaining support from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

Lisette Mascarenhas, Ag-West Bio's Vice President of Health and Nutrition, says the IFT show is the largest of its kind.

"It's a science and research exchange, education meeting and trade show all in one for people involved in the agri-food business," Mascarenhas stated. "They learn about each other's products, any new developments in the market and people who are trying to plug in to the market."

Literally thousands of people from around the world will attend the conference, and Saskatchewan's display will be part of a trade show that boasts over 2,000 exhibitors. The delegation, known as "Solutions Saskatchewan," will include private companies such as POS Pilot Plant Corporation, CanMar Grain Products Ltd., FarmPure Foods and Mustard Capital Inc. There will also be representatives of Ag-West Bio, the Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"We will talk about Saskatchewan as the home to 40 per cent of Canada's arable land, and our position as the largest grain producer," Mascarenhas said. "We have top quality ingredients and technical expertise, right from basic research and product research to commercialization and venture capital. Our cluster includes everything needed to make it ideal for a company to come to our province."

According to the IFT, some 70 per cent of those attending the conference are there to find new products, and 87 per cent of the visitors either make the buying decisions or have significant influence over the buying decisions of their companies and organizations.

Mascarenhas says those delegates will hear a lot about a very well-integrated agri-food industry in Saskatchewan.

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"If you want cutting edge research in the agri-food business, you have that represented here," she stated. "If I was looking from the outside, I would want to know what complementary and enabling technologies Saskatchewan offers, in addition to providing capital and research experience. People should be proud of the fact that we go right from basic research to product launches here in the province."

The trade fair at the Chicago meetings includes displays organized around the themes of organic food ingredients, health food ingredients, food safety and quality, and international suppliers like the Solutions Saskatchewan group.

Mascarenhas says her group will be exploring some very large potential markets for the province's products. "For instance, as a producer of oats, partly processed oats and wheat, or finished grain products, I would want someone perhaps from Kellogg's or Quaker to buy my product," she noted. "If you are into mustard processing, Dijon and French's and various large mustard companies will be there. There are companies such as Unilever, Kraft and Nestlé who will all be looking for ingredients. We will be talking to their leading-edge food technologists."

Mascarenhas says, while actual contracts may not be signed at the show, relationships will begin which may see two-way visiting between Saskatchewan agri-business players and major international companies, and eventually representatives of those companies coming here to see our industry cluster at work.

"If you are looking for a channel to connect to the rest of the world, here is an opportunity," she stated.

The IFT conference in Chicago runs from July 28 to August 1.

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SASKATCHEWAN MANUFACTURER DEVELOPS WORLD'S LARGEST AIR SEEDER

An innovative new machine produced by Langbank-based implement manufacturer Seed Hawk Inc. lends credibility to their slogan as "The Emerging Leader" in the agricultural equipment sector.

The company's new 84-foot air seeder is the largest in the world, adding to Saskatchewan's reputation as a global leader in agri-business innovation.

Seed Hawk co-founder and president Pat Beaujot says the project has been several months in the making. "We have a very talented professional engineer, Dave Hundeby, who has about 35 years of experience designing cultivator frames. We put him to work on this specific project about a year ago," he stated.

"When the design process began, we had certain parameters set. We wanted to try to keep the design under 17 feet high, and we succeeded at that. The transport width is wider than we would have liked, but to get an 84-foot machine down a road can be quite difficult. It ended up being 24 feet across the bottom and 27 feet across the top."

This particular unit differs from a standard-size seeder in several ways. Hundeby beefed up the hitch to accommodate pulling the machine along with large carts and product. All of the hinge points were also redesigned for improved strength, and replaceable bushings were added to the hinge points on the wings.

"The biggest model we used to make was 66 feet as a five-plex design, but with the increase in width to the new seeder, we had to go to a seven-plex design. We have added a third set of wings, but it is still our standard depth from front to back," Beaujot noted.

With an 84-foot toolbar, the new unit can seed 50 acres an hour traveling at five miles per hour, making it possible for a producer to comfortably seed 640 acres in a single day.

The seeder was designed to address a growing demand in the industry. With the average farm size increasing and labour becoming increasingly difficult to find, Beaujot says producers are seeking larger equipment.

"Timing is everything in the spring, and certainly if farmers can get their crops planted in the window between May 1 and 15, they will get a much better crop," he noted. "If it takes farmers three weeks to seed their crops, and they don't get three weeks of good weather, then they will be giving up some yield."

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Beaujot says it is important to stay innovative with respect to equipment design in the agricultural industry, because farms and demands are constantly changing.

"Technology is evolving every day, and new innovations such as GPS and auto-steer are being incorporated into tractors, making it easier to seed with an 84-foot drill and be within a foot of accuracy. Years ago, farmers wouldn't have been able to seed with that many feet and do it accurately, but nowadays, things are changing rapidly, and the agricultural industry is no exception," he stated.

"Seed Hawk has to feed industry demands and be more creative then ever before in order to help our customers become more profitable. If our customers are more profitable, then we'll be more profitable, too."

Beaujot says Saskatchewan has a lot to be proud of when it comes to its very resourceful and inventive agri-business industry, and he's happy to be a part of it. "Saskatchewan has by far the most innovative bunch of seeding equipment manufacturers in the world. Seed Hawk has grown to become one of the top competitors in the market," he stated.

"It has been our company philosophy from the start, and we are certainly on top of it. We want to be the leader, and we clearly are the leader in many areas with regard to seeding equipment."

More information on this and other Seed Hawk products can be found on the company's website at www.seedhawk.com.

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IS CANOLA READY FOR THE CROWN?

Wheat may still be king on the Prairies, but a new prince is vying for the crown.

This year, Saskatchewan farmers seeded a record numbers of acres of canola. Statistics Canada has revealed that 7.2 million acres of the oilseed are in the ground. That's an increase of 20 per cent from last year.

The trend is similar across the rest of the Prairies, with over 14.5 million acres of canola seeded in all three provinces – an increase of 17 per cent.

At the same time, spring wheat acreage on the Prairies dropped 19 per cent to 14.8 million acres. It is the lowest level since 1970, but still just enough for spring wheat to keep the title for the biggest crop on the Prairies.

But for how long?

Darin Egert, the president of the Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, says the increase is welcome news to crop advocates who have been working hard to boost its production.

"The Canola Council of Canada rolled out a program where they wanted to significantly increase the amount of canola being grown. This is a good step towards that goal," he stated.

The Canola Council of Canada has set a target of boosting annual production from 9.1 million tonnes in 2006 to 15 million tonnes by 2015.

Egert says consumers are helping to drive the amount of canola acres seeded each year.

"Producers are responding to the market demand. Part of it is food demand, but the biodiesel industry is also starting to grow. To fill that market, we are going to have to increase production," he noted.

A big jump in production this year could put downward pressure on the price, but Egert predicts the dip won't be serious.

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"It may hurt the price in the short term, but we're hoping to build more and more markets, so that it's not an issue," he said. "I'm confident those markets will be there. The futures market is pretty strong right now, even with the record number of acres that went in this year."

Egert says both the marketing and production side of the equation may be benefiting from canola's new high profile.

"There has been a lot of attention to canola. The trans fat issue is an example, where large fast food companies are adopting canola, or in New York, where the city banned trans fats. Canola has been in the news quite a bit," he stated.

With both foreign and domestic demand for biofuels increasing, Egert and others are predicting that more and more producers will be putting canola in their rotations.

"I think the amount of acres seeded is going to keep going up. I can't see the record being broken every year—there are going to be some ups and some downs based on market and crop rotation—but I do think the acreages will increase," he said.

Moreover, not only is the popularity of the crop expanding, but so too is its capability. "Canola is grown in areas now that haven't had much production in the past. The Rosetown area, for instance, has seen some significant increases," Egert noted. "With the different varieties that are now available, you are able to grow canola under many different conditions."

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ON THE LOOKOUT FOR BERTHA

In war, battles can be won or lost based on the quality of the intelligence about the enemy. Knowing your enemy's position and strength can be a huge advantage.

Saskatchewan canola producers will have that advantage this year when it comes to a costly pest – the Bertha Armyworm.

Dale Risula, Integrated Cropping Management Systems Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, says there are a lot more people participating in the provincial monitoring program this year. This program monitors adult moths emerging from their pupae. The monitors use pheromone traps to catch the moths as they emerge from the soil.

"The number of people who are monitoring for us is up by 50 per cent, so that's a pretty good indicator that there was some concern about this problem because of last year's fairly wide-spread impact on canola growers," Risula said.

Last year was a particularly bad year for the Bertha Armyworm, with significant crop damage in the northeast and east-central parts of the province.

Risula says the more monitors they have, the better the intelligence that is gathered.

"You get a better indication of where the outbreaks are taking place and a better representative sample of the moth counts that are out there," he stated. "That will give us a better idea of what might take place this year, because it seems as though the moth count corresponds with the outbreak of worms. All of those things will add to the accuracy and understanding the intensity of any particular outbreak that might take place."

A map of armyworm hotspots is prepared by SAF from the data collected by the monitors. This gives an early warning to producers in areas of potentially high risk. Knowing that information can help in many ways. For example, chemical companies will be able to have insecticide readily available in particular areas where an outbreak is likely.

"It's important that people are aware of these pests when they show up, and then properly assess the numbers on a field-by-field basis to determine whether or not action needs to take place. Spraying for the sake of spraying may be more costly than beneficial."

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Of course, Mother Nature herself may help win the battle before the war begins. Risula points out that there are a number of environmental and biological factors that could dramatically cut armyworm numbers either before or after they emerge.

"The worms are subject to different types of predators, parasites and disease that are out there. In particular, there is a type of fungus that affects the larva. If that fungus happened to be fairly severe last year, in the worm population nearing the end of the season, then it could be that the outbreak is reduced," he noted.

"The other factor is the survival rate of the pupae over winter. A cold winter and a lack of snow cover could reduce the number of moths that emerge."

Risula says that the intelligence being gathered through the monitoring program should soon reveal what producers will be up against.

More information on Berth Armyworm moth counts and risk map is available on the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca.

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RECOGNIZING AGRICULTURAL EXCELLENCE

Saskatchewan has witnessed some outstanding achievements in agriculture from its producers, organizations and businesses over the years. You can help celebrate these accomplishments by putting their names forward for a prestigious national honour.

Nominations are now being accepted for the seventh annual Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence. The awards recognize extraordinary contributions in six key areas vital to the ongoing success of the agricultural sector: innovation, environmental stewardship, export performance, volunteerism, agricultural awareness and youth leadership.

The youth leadership category is being offered for the first time this year. According to Christine Moses, the project leader for the awards with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), it is an important and very welcome addition.

"The youth are the next generation of farming. You can see the energy level of the young people who are involved in agriculture, and it's a terrific dynamic," she said.

"The recent farm census showed that the average age of our farmers is now over 50 years old, and we need more young people to revitalize the industry and keep it vibrant. So it's important that we recognize and promote the young champions who are involved in this sector."

Moses says the awards help to educate Canadians about farming and agriculture in general. "When we conducted consultations with the industry surrounding the Agricultural Policy Framework, there was a very strong sentiment that the public needs to know where their food comes from, and that we need to do more to celebrate this industry," she stated.

"People are very eager to tell the story of agriculture, and to explain the good things that they're doing. That's part of what we're trying to accomplish through these awards."

The awards are sponsored by AAFC and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, one of Canada's premier agricultural showcases held each year in Toronto. Winners receive a trip to the fair, where the awards will be presented during a ceremony on November 5.

While it's a tremendous credit to be recognized by your peers across Canada, Moses says winning an agricultural award as a top performer in this country is really a lot more than just a national honour.

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"Canada's global reputation in agriculture and agri-food is second to none. We're stars in the international world, and our name really holds that up," she stated.

"When our agricultural exporters are traveling around the world and promoting Canadian products, they know they have a good thing going. So to win an award in this industry in this country really puts you in an elite class across the globe."

The deadline for nominations for the Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence is September 7, 2007.

Selection criteria and nomination forms are available online at www.agr.gc.ca/awards, or by contacting AAFC by phone at 1-800-410-7104 or e-mail at info@agr.gc.ca. Information on the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair can be found at www.royalfair.org, or by calling (416) 263-3411.

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